

Examiners' Report/  
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2013

GCE Religious Studies 6RS02  
Paper 1F  
Study of the New Testament

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## **AREA 1F New Testament**

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### **Introduction**

#### GENERAL COMMENTS

The Investigations Paper continues to draw from an inspiring range of topics within a wide range of varied academic fields. The high standard of work evidenced in June 2013 was no exception to historical high standards as candidates demonstrated a very high level of independent student enquiry which clearly showed their engagement with their area of investigation. Their knowledge of a particular academic field was evidenced in the way they independently used and evaluated a wide range of source material. The enthusiasm for and knowledge of the chosen topic was clearly conveyed in many answers that were truly academic in their approach. Some Centres chose to focus on the same or similar topics for all their candidates, whereas other Centres permitted considerable choice for individual candidates. Candidates were very well prepared for the examination and it was evident that Centres used their specialist resources and interests to encourage candidates to research in depth a particular area of study. It is important to stress again that the 'Investigations' unit has a definite academic purpose. The aim is to involve students as active participants pursuing open-ended enquiries with an emphasis on independent learning. Questions were designed to be inclusive of all possible approaches to various topics and all valid answers were considered.

Whilst most centres had entered their candidates for the correct option there were still a few entries for particular areas of study where consideration regarding entry for a different area of study may have been beneficial to the candidate. It is important to ensure candidates know which area of their investigation is the best fit for the question they answer on the paper. There was evidence of candidates choosing a different question on the paper to the question they had clearly prepared for before the examination. In some of these cases the candidate was using material suitable for Question 1 to answer Question 3 (or vice versa) and not really grappling fully with the demands of the question. This practice does not always work to the best effect as the candidate might end up answering neither question as fully as possible. Candidates were not penalised if correct entries were not made or a cross was put in a box that did not match the answer or if no box was ticked at all. Examiners were encouraged to mark positively and to credit all valid material according to the mark scheme and question paper. Centres should ensure that candidates are entered for the option that matches their area of study and that candidates are clear about which question they have been prepared for on the paper. There is still evidence of Centres studying Papers 1B and 1F being entered for 1A. This might be an oversight regarding filling out the form – Centres must choose 6RS02 and then identify which of the seven papers from 1A to 1G is the specific entry.

Variation in achievement was related to the two assessment objectives. These objectives should receive prominent attention in the process of the investigation. Importantly there must be explicit attention to these objectives in the examination answer and also to the question that is

intended to focus the answer. Each question consistently referred to the assessment objectives with the trigger word 'Examine' for AO1 and 'Comment on' for AO2. These dictated the structure of the question and helped candidates to plan their answers. It would be advisable for candidates to pay regular attention to the level descriptors for these assessment objectives as a way of monitoring their development and progress during their investigations. The phrase 'with reference to the topic you have investigated' will always appear in the question to ensure that the generic question can be answered with material from any appropriate investigation. The mark scheme itself is generic to all questions but the answer itself is not necessarily generic as candidates are expected to use their material to answer the question. The purpose of the question is to challenge candidates to adapt their material so that at the highest levels they may demonstrate a coherent understanding of the task based on the selection of their material. Widely deployed evidence/arguments/sources were evident in well structured responses to the task whereby a clearly expressed viewpoint was supported by well-deployed evidence and reasoned argument. There was skilful deployment of religious language in many answers and the fluency of good essays showed command over the material; such command makes for high outcomes and rewards the amount of hard work done by the candidate.

Candidates at the lower end of achievement struggled with the demands of the question. In preparation for this examination some candidates may find it useful to write up their investigation under exam timed conditions to a variety of different possible questions. They might build up a number of different essay plans to different possible questions. The important point in these activities is to enable candidates to develop their management of material such as how to best structure their content to answer the specific question. However, success can be undermined by writing up a rote-learned answer which was not adapted to the question set or by answering a question that has been written for a topic they have not studied. There was evidence of rote learned answers using the same structure and material inclusive of quotes; whilst much information was relevant to the topic and consequently was awarded in terms of AO1, there was a significant lack of engagement with the specific demands of the question and consequently marks for AO2 were low, with only generic evaluation provided. This approach is contrasted with another form where candidates were trained to answer the question; arguably, this is evidence of good practice but at the lower end some candidates thought it was sufficient to simply use the question stimulus at the end of each paragraph. The best answers were those which were guided by the statement as opposed to simply '*tagging it on*' to content that they were already anticipating to write about. A balanced approach to the question that meets the highest levels of achievement according to both assessment objectives is obviously desirable and the generic question accommodates many possible routes to success whereby any valid approach to the question was credited.

## **Specific Comments – Area 1F – The Study of the New Testament**

The overall standard of the responses to these questions were scholarly and consistent with the performance of previous sittings. Candidates once again drew on a range of interesting material.

### **Question 1 Religion and Science**

Candidates are reluctant to discuss with confidence how the study of the interface between religion and science might have real relevance for the study of the New Testament. There is scope for examining the historical interaction between religion and science by focussing on the dialogue between Christianity and the natural sciences. The New Testament provides rich material for the application of natural science, for example, miracle narratives and eschatology. Very few candidates addressed, for example, how divine intervention in the New Testament could be interpreted by examining the possibilities for scientific explanations such as emergentist theory. Most candidates concentrated on the Hume's response to miracles, with varying success and the views of Dawkins were ever-present; candidates focussing on Hume often omitted aspects of Hume's critique that is largely scientific such as cause and effect, the principle of evidence and the laws of nature.

The question provided wide scope for discussing whether modern scientific advances contribute to an understanding of the New Testament and the best candidates handled this very well. There are many different ways of approaching the question such as examining Models for the relationship of religion and science and commenting on how far these models can allow for divine activity found in the New Testament. Models of God can, in varying degrees, allow for scientific explanations of New Testament narrative. It is a shame that the take up for this question remains low as the potential of this area of study remain largely unexplored.

Finally candidates who presented academic answers to this question are to be commended for how well-versed they were on the New Testament and related philosophical issues. Successful responses had a solid grasp of New Testament scholarship and how this related to the religion and science debate. At the top end, many answers were excellent and received very high marks. There was a clear and detailed understanding of the issues and of the religious and theological meanings behind them. Candidates referred to a range of scholars, both ancient and modern, and attempted a detailed theological discussion firmly contextually situated within the religion and science relationship. There was proficient use and understanding of complex theological ideas such as 'salvation' and the use of New Testament symbolism was impressive.

In the lower ranges of responses candidates were comfortable with material from either religion or science but had some difficulty in relating both.

## Exemplar 1

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When applying science to the New Testament, one should consider the miracles of Jesus. Over the years, scholars have devised several definitions of the term miracle, perhaps the most favoured and most prominent being Hume's definition of a miracle as a 'violation of the laws of nature'. From this, a major issue arises. Philosophers have devised a theory known as the epistemic theory of miracles which sets out to dodge the scientist's bullet that a miracle can never occur as the laws of nature are concrete, and thus can never be broken. In Hume's sense, a transgression therefore does not take place. Miracles are said to not agree with our understanding of nature, but are still said to be part of a natural order. If a miracle was to occur, then it would not make the laws of nature false, as J.L. Mackie explains: "the laws of nature describe the way the world works when not interfered with. A miracle occurs when the world is not left to itself, when something distinct from the natural order intrudes into it". Perhaps then, the whole exercise of applying science to the New Testament in an attempt to bring something to our understanding of Jesus' teachings, is a nonsensical and inane exercise, in that a belief in miracles is connected with the belief that there are aspects of reality which are forever beyond scientific scrutiny.

Once philosophers have gotten around the issue as to entertain the mere possibility of miracles taking place, one can then begin to interpret the miracle accounts in an attempt to get to the theological meaning and to evaluate as to whether such accounts took place. Over the centuries, scholars have demarcated several categories of the types of miracles which Jesus performed. The category which appears to be most problematic to scientists and theologians alike, are the nature miracles whereby Jesus appears to suspend and even transgress the natural laws. These have proved to be the most difficult to explain naturally and logically, but nevertheless, explanations are still attempted. For example, in Matthew, there is an account which describes Jesus walking across water in the middle of a storm on a lake. Explanations include the idea that perhaps Jesus was only walking on a sandbar or a low profile boat, so to only appear as if he was walking on water. This is a possibility, however, in the account, it says 'they were many stadia away from the land' - as a stadium was about 600 feet, it seems highly unlikely that Jesus would have been able to get out of the fishing boat, especially in a storm, to do so. Another alternative interpretation which has emerged during recent years, is the possibility that perhaps Jesus was walking on ice. Professor Dorn Nof, who is a professor of Oceanography at Florida State University, calculated the likelihood of such ice formation, and found that it was a possibility, owing to the fact that salt springs which flowed into Lake Kinneret where the incident would have taken place, would have enabled the temperature of the water to decrease to -4 degrees Celsius: 'the probability of ice formation is about 1 in 1000, however, during the time period which Jesus lived, such 'ice springs' probably formed ever 30-60 years'. Nevertheless, we cannot outright accept this as a definitive explanation. Surely, we should pay closer attention to the nature of the disciples who witnessed such miracles. They were experienced fishermen, and would have noticed if there was ice. Additionally, upon seeing such a thing, they proclaimed 'truly, you are the son of God' which would not be expected to have been hyperbolised to the extent that it was if Jesus was simply walking on ice. The fact that they thought Jesus was a ghost, adds credibility to the account - it was a primal reaction to the abnormality of the scene. While Hume's comment that miracles are only ever believed by a 'ignorant and barbarous' nation may be resonated by the skeptic, we must consider the nature of the disciples, who were so confident of what they saw, that they'd rather die for their beliefs than deny it ever happened, as John Drane comments: "nobody ever dies for their belief unless they are totally convinced of its truth". Here, scientific advances do not seem to discredit the nature miracle accounts - as they cannot be applied definitively to them. Though providing somewhat logical explanations, they are equally as susceptible to flaws. They thus only help the New Testament to flourish in their significance and glory, showing that Jesus was superior over physical and metaphysical worlds, whether symbolic or not, Jesus' power is evident.

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### Healing:

Attempts to try to rationalise the healing miracles appear to be much less complicated, and usually follow down the route that they were illusions or trickery. For example, in the account where Jesus healed the paralytic in Mark, people have often suggested that the paralytic pretended to be paralysed, and hence his grandiose entry and public healing would demonstrate to all the spectators how powerful Jesus really is. However, simply stating that this is a possibility does not make it a reality. There is nothing in the account to suggest that collusion was occurring. Additionally, this would be very contradictory towards the honest and good nature of Jesus, and would thus detract from the understanding of the New Testament moral teachings, of honesty and modesty. Put down the healing miracles to psychological healings and the power of suggestion, which is a factor seen very often among the modern 'faith healers' of today. Kathy Sykes, a professor of Science and Society at Bristol University comments that 'the power of the placebo is breathtaking'. People can be manipulated through speech and faith, to an extent that they release hormones which enable them to get out of their wheelchairs for a time, or feel as if they've been healed. It is perfectly feasible to suggest that this is what Jesus may have done, and that the healings were only short term. Professor Anne Harrington of Harvard University explains: "a person's belief can cause the pituitary gland to release endorphins which are the body's natural painkillers". As this affect is temporary, as are the healings, Jesus' healing miracles could be seen as no longer being miraculous. At face value, this could be perceived as detracting from our understanding of the New Testament - of Jesus being powerful and as fulfilling the role of Messiah. It is very remarkable however, how many people seem to take what Jesus says literally. Jesus said 'it is the sick that need a doctor...I have not come to invite the virtuous but the sinners'. Whether these healings have occurred through means of nature, should be of little importance when it comes to what Jesus actually wanted us to understand by this. He was much more concerned with spiritual healings, so that people could enter his kingdom, that with physical healings. As observed by American theologian, Albert Barnes: "it may come as a surprise, seeing as the man came to be healed, that Jesus should at first pronounce his sins as forgiven. If it had merely been stated without a miracle, then the Jews wouldn't have believed it. In proof of it, he worked a miracle, and nobody could doubt that he had the power". Arguably, these miracles were needed to make his message appear credible, however, Jesus himself sought not to produce such 'signs' of his messiahship, and said himself that those who asked for one belonged to a 'wicked and adulterous nation'. The scientific advances which declare a psychological factor in these healings, would then contradict to our understanding of Jesus' message - it was not the healing that was of importance, but the alleviation of sins. Whether symbolic or not, Jesus was demonstrating his divine compassion.

### Exorcism:

The exorcism miracles, are likewise also often put down to psychological healings, such as in the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac in Luke. The idea of demon possession has been given added impetus by the scientific advancements of our knowledge on mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and Tourette's syndrome, which are often symptomatic of demon possession, such as bursts of uncontrollable profanity. Given the fact that individuals suffering from such illnesses are much more vulnerable to the power of suggestion, it's easy to perceive how such individuals may come to believe that their minds have been penetrated by an external, evil agency. D. H. Rawcliffe comments: "to the hallucinated, demon-possessed man, the ability of the priest or inanimate icon to exorcise was a fact of existence known since infancy. The astonishing results of the exorcism were due to no more than the readily assimilated counter suggestion". Demon possessed individuals could be released out of this state, often

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temporarily, through such exorcisms, and so the exorcisms that Jesus performed could be attributed to the idea that they acted as a form of primitive psychotherapy, which would show that these were not remarkable acts, thus demonstrating perhaps that Jesus was not powerful as once understood by 1<sup>st</sup> century society. However, there is still quite a lot about the accounts, and indeed about demon possession in general that cannot be explained psychologically, for example, how Jesus drove out the demons in such a short time frame, and into pigs. Until science can explain everything, it cannot radically dismiss the idea that exorcisms took place. As Marcus Borg proclaims: "it is virtually indisputable that Jesus was a healer and an exorcist". Scientific advances, while adding to the mechanism of how Jesus may have alleviated mental suffering for a time, fails to undermine or detract from the symbolic notion evident in these exorcism accounts, that Jesus had supremacy over evil forces, thus demonstrating his utmost supremacy over the natural and supernatural.

### Resurrection:

- supernatural
- comatose
- obvious point
- not aware of medical issues
- progression and manifest
- jairu, nain, laz-his is utmost
- symbolic
- rudolf bult
- aquinas
- detract
- very distant description- not very significant?

The problem presented by the resurrection miracles is that they are staggeringly supernatural, and thus become very hard to explain how they may have occurred, without saying that they are merely fabrications. However, the main ways to explain usually entertain the idea that they were never true resurrections, and they were all just in comatose states of which Jesus was able to take them away from. This is a possibility, especially given the fact that the ancients were less aware as we are now of the medical intricacies that may lead to someone looking dead. Alternatively, many theologians have discussed the possible symbolic nature of such miracles. Given the fact they are the most extraordinary accounts, they are given very little attention in the accounts, and many scholars have commented on how they are written in a very understated manner. This led to interpretations being made that they were merely used as a way to symbolise the progression and manifestation of Jesus' power; Jairus' daughter was raised immediately, the man at nain was raised as he was being carried to his grave, and Lazarus was raised four days after he died. These are often seen as preparatory to that one final moment of resurrection power- Jesus' own resurrection. This symbolic interpretation has often led scholars to believe that perhaps none of the miracles accounts are historical fact, and are indeed used to demonstrate the symbolic powers of Jesus to forgive sins, and to demonstrate his message of compassion. Scholars began to devise ways of getting to the heart of the biblical teachings, such as through Rudolf Bultmann's method of demythologisation, who dispelled the notion of miracles in light of the fact that he thought such ideas were preventing people from being Christians, and detracting from the underlying messages: "man's mastery and knowledge has advanced to such an extent through science and technology that one can no longer hold the New Testament view of the world". It is instead, the parables and theological message which is of paramount importance in the New Testament. As Aquinas stated: "the issue of

miracles is not important, the essence of religion is not at stake here". With all this considered however, one cannot ignore the fact that Christianity is not merely just an account of timeless ethical values, the miracles brought purposes of their own, by adding credibility to Jesus' message, as the book of John states: "many believed in his name, when they saw the things he had done". If scientific advances go so far as to state that the miracles never occurred, it would not have impacted religion today perhaps as much as it would have done then. It would allow Jesus' teachings to become forefront, and not simply ignored in favour of mystical accounts.

Many feel that science has no longer allowed us to entertain the notion of miracles happening. This is an unwarranted philosophical assertion. God does not need to transgress the laws of nature, for he is over and beyond the laws of nature.

allows to entertain moralistic

God can have supremacy.

Magnifies NT teachings- symbol/not

The essay introduction shows familiarity with the religion and science debate and the chosen topic, miracles, provided enough scope to delve into a wide range of New Testament material. The reader is drawn into a very strong argument that is set out by a candidate who controls the material with confidence. The candidate moves very quickly into demonstrating a wide range of knowledge on the topic and situated it very clearly within the religion and science debate. Issues were raised coherently and a logical progression of ideas expressed a very high standard of debate that permeated the whole essay. The argument in the conclusion is drawn from New Testament material in the body of the essay that was juxtaposed appropriately with a number of scholarly comments that showed a clear understanding of the issues. The question is answered decisively and there is no doubt left as to the candidate's knowledge and understanding of this topic and whether they had answered the question. This essay was very well done.

## **Question 2 New Testament Ethics and Morality**

At the top end, the answers to this question were really excellent, offering detailed ethical analysis of New Testament teachings, coupled with a range of useful scholarship and proficient use of religious language.

However, in the mid-range, many concentrated a little too heavily on Situation Ethics and Natural Moral Law at the expense of New Testament exegesis. Answers tended to rely mostly on ethical theory, with New Testament material added as something of an after-thought. Greater parity between the New Testament and Ethics content within such responses would raise achievement. There was also evidence of an essay structure which meant that candidates were devoting a significant part of their essay to the Old Testament at the expense of New Testament exemplification. This area of study is explicitly focussed on the New Testament and not the Old Testament; the study of the Old Testament is already offered in another unit (6RS02/1E). The study of the New Testament already suggests a different focus and in the time allowed candidates might depress their achievement if they try to focus on both the Old and New Testaments in their response. That said, it is completely valid to use the Old Testament to root New Testament teachings but candidates are to be reminded that this approach

calls for precision and awareness of the New Testament context within which they are writing.

At the lower-end, a number of students concentrated on a GCSE-style analysis of marriage, abortion and homosexuality, lacking any real depth of discussion or scholarship. Once again, as noted last year, it must be stressed that some topics share generic ideas across a number of different areas and it is vital that candidates know the **distinctive** features of their investigation for example; there can be overlap with topics addressed in Area 1C and candidates who focussed more on classical ethical theory rather than New Testament ethics might have used the material they investigated more effectively in Area 1C. The same point also applies to the distinctive focus that is required by either a Study of the Old Testament or the New Testament. This reminder has been offered before but still seems to present a problem for weaker candidates.

### **Question 3 Life After Death**

By far the most popular question and excellent at the top end with a clear and concise analysis of New Testament teachings, coupled with philosophical debate. The range of scholarship and textual analysis was impressive and candidates were comfortable with handling their material to answer the question.

In the mid-range there was too much emphasis on philosophical arguments about life after death, with the New Testament used as an after-thought. Also, many concentrated solely on Paul's teachings in 1 Corinthians 15 or on the dilemma of the empty tomb, but lacked the depth of detail and scholarship required for the highest marks. Some candidates were less comfortable with New Testament theology and tended to concentrate on confining themselves to re-writing the textual narrative without developing further ideas from it; others linked philosophical ideas at a basic level or made little reference to the New Testament. Quite a number missed the real meaning of the question and concentrated on tangential issues. A problem regarding the use of biblical material still persists and the point made for question 2 applies to this question also: weaker candidates writing a few pages on Old Testament roots for beliefs regarding Life after Death could have made more effective use of their time by ensuring that the significance of this material for New Testament teachings was clearly drawn out. Whilst Old Testament teachings are acknowledged as relevant material, candidates must link this material explicitly to their study of the New Testament. Candidates were not marked down for this approach but credited for how they used this material within a study of the New Testament if they managed to make it clear why Old Testament narratives and quotes were essential to their argument. This question evidenced the greatest disparity amongst responses which ranged from candidates being very well prepared to others having difficulty with answering the question.

One final point that still needs addressing by some centres: there was still evidence of candidates, presumably from the same centre, presenting a wide range of material organised within a recognisable structure, illustrated by the same quotes and scholars. Some of these candidates struggled to adapt

their learned material to the demands of the question. It is also questionable how far candidates had engaged with independent research as they wrote essays similar in style with some paragraphs word for word. A02 achievement is upwardly levelled by this practice if candidates fail to comment on their material with the question in mind. It is not enough to tag on the question at the end of the section by arguing that this material shows 'x' if they cannot explain why this is the case.

**Advice for candidates:**

- Do not ignore the question; manage your material to focus on the demands of the question.
- Use appropriate sources and, if possible, include recent scholarship.
- Demonstrate how well you understand the topic by your selection of material.
- Do not forget to comment on your material. Show that you have thought about your research.
- Use your evidence to substantiate your argument.
- Comment on alternative views if you know them.
- Express your viewpoint clearly with academic humility.
- Practice writing under timed conditions as part of your preparation.
- Do not spend too long writing out your essay plan to the detriment of the essay itself.
- Spell key terms and key scholars correctly.

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